



The Books I've Read

by Megan L. Steusloff

image info

I have walked the shores of Prince Edward Island with a kindred spirit, journeyed through Middle-earth with a hero hobbit, fought gallantly to defend Camelot with a legendary king, and loved with all my heart a spider named Charlotte. I cheered in triumph when Aslan returned and sobbed when Sirius Black fell from a death curse. I've trembled on an age-changing merry-go-round and soared through the skies with Amelia. I have cherished the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin and found hope in the annex with Anne Frank. I have anguished with Mercutio and traveled the Mississippi with Huck and Jim. I have formed bonds and found connections with characters and writers that transcend place and time in moments of wonder that feel more real to me than the world I am in.

Looking back, I remember the book I was reading during so many important moments of my life. The books that were stuffed in my carry-on bag on various adventures, that were at the hospital with me when my children were born, that I picked up from a window of the library while wearing a mask and gloves during the COVID-19 pandemic, that I turned to when I felt lost or sad or wild or curious. I have books with highlighted phrases and notes in the margins; books that have been worn down and hugged, thrown, shared, and returned. I have books that will remain sacred and beloved on my bookshelf until the day that I die.

As a reader, books are my ticket by which to learn and explore the world and the characters that come to life on the pages before me. At the same time, books allow me intriguing access to my own fears, talents, beliefs, and potential. As a writer, words are my ticket to immortality, to the power and ability to leave a mark on this world and touch people long after I am gone.

Emily Dickinson. Maya Angelou. Ernest

Hemingway. Nathaniel Hawthorne. Robert Frost. Bram Stoker. Homer. Jane Austin. Hans Christian Anderson. Laura Ingalls Wilder. Langston Hughes... and countless more. They will never be forgotten. On the pages of their books and through their words, they have found eternal life. They are a boundless gift to the world. I do not, however, believe that was their goal; they did not aspire to live forever on the shelves of the local library. They wrote what they knew and loved and imagined. They wrote because that was what they were meant to do. I am grateful they followed their own paths, allowed us a window into their souls, and inspired those they left behind to do the same.

I have a master's degree in reading and language arts, and I work as a reading specialist in an elementary school. I have read so many books. As a student, I have had deadlines to meet, writing essays, comparisons and opinions; I've had to think deeply about themes and purpose. I was assigned books I would never have chosen myself and introduced to books that I've come to revere. As a teacher, I get to share my love of books every single day. My goal is to find that book that will ignite a passion for reading in every single one of my students. We talk and write and draw about books. We wonder and ask questions. We notice author's techniques. We get lost and find ourselves. We celebrate books and words and ideas. We track our reading and set challenging reading goals. The work that we do is safe and fun and wonderful and filled with risk and adventure. Our classroom is a worldly place. Books are our treasure and the prize. How did I get so lucky?

I am the people that I love, the places I have been, and the books that I have read. I am happy, indebted, and yearning for more. ∞